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Letter dated 3 August 2016 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

Further to my latest report to the Security Council concerning the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2016/572), I hereby request the Council to consider the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which is due to expire on 31 August 2016. In a letter dated 25 July 2016 addressed to me, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Emigrants of Lebanon requested that the Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further period of one year, without amendment.

As we approach the 10-year mark of the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006), I commend the continued commitment of both the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces to the cessation of hostilities and their close coordination and cooperation with UNIFIL. Over the past decade, despite a number of serious breaches of the cessation of hostilities, areas of southern Lebanon and the northern border of Israel have experienced long periods of calm. That is even more noteworthy in the light of the destabilizing developments in the region.

Notwithstanding the calm and stability that continues to prevail across the Blue Line, there has been no tangible progress towards a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution, as called for in resolution 1701 (2006), and the root causes of the conflict remain largely unaddressed. It is the responsibility of Lebanon and Israel to fulfil their respective obligations under the resolution. Israel must withdraw from Lebanese territory and stop violations of Lebanese airspace. The Government of Lebanon must exercise effective authority over all Lebanese territory, prevent hostile actions from its territory, ensure the safety and security of the civilian population in addition to that of United Nations personnel and also ensure the disarmament of all armed groups so that there will be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than that of the Lebanese State.

In pursuing a comprehensive approach to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and integrating the activities and initiatives of UNIFIL, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon and the United Nations country team, the United Nations intends to closely involve the Government of Lebanon in the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and increase the capacity of the Lebanese Armed Forces.

UNIFIL continues to play a crucial role in ensuring peace and stability in southern Lebanon, as well as ensuring full respect for the Blue Line by both Lebanon and Israel. In accordance with its mandate, UNIFIL continues to monitor

the cessation of hostilities and to assist the Lebanese Armed Forces in taking steps towards the establishment between the Blue Line and the Litani River of an area free of any unauthorized armed personnel, assets and weapons. UNIFIL remains engaged with the parties on facilitating the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces from northern Ghajar and continues to monitor and report on ground and air violations of resolution 1701 (2006). UNIFIL takes all necessary action within its capabilities to ensure that its area of operations is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind. The UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander, supported by the substantive civilian component of the Mission, also closely engages with central and local government entities on extending the effective authority of the Government of Lebanon to all communities in southern Lebanon, including through the provision of services.

In addition to carrying out its dual mandate of conducting maritime interdiction operations in the area of maritime operations and training Lebanese navy personnel, the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force provides critical support to the naval branch of the Lebanese Armed Forces to strengthen security control over Lebanese territorial waters and to prevent the entry of unauthorized materiel into Lebanon, thereby contributing to the overall stability of the country.

The Lebanese Armed Forces and security services play an increasingly critical role in preserving the stability of Lebanon in the light of the multiple security challenges that the country faces. Cooperation between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces, on land and at sea, remains essential for the implementation of the mandate of UNIFIL. Circumstances unanticipated at the time of the adoption of resolution 1701 (2006) pose enormous demands on the Lebanese Armed Forces throughout Lebanon. Nevertheless, within the framework of the strategic relationship that UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces have established, there is close cooperation in the implementation of the resolution and their forces continue to carry out a significant number of coordinated activities.

I underline the need for increased and targeted international support for the Lebanese Armed Forces, based on the latter's capabilities development plan and within the framework of the International Support Group for Lebanon, including in the context of the Strategic Dialogue between the Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL. Capacity-building is a long-term endeavour. It is not only important in order to assist the Lebanese Armed Forces in implementing tasks mandated by resolution 1701 (2006) but is also key to a permanent ceasefire.

The well-established liaison and coordination arrangements of UNIFIL with the parties, including the tripartite forum, have provided a mechanism to de-escalate and defuse tension and to build confidence between the two sides, including by facilitating a number of practical security arrangements on the ground and understandings between the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Israel Defense Forces to reduce potential points of friction and further stabilize the situation along the Blue Line. I urge both parties to continue to work with UNIFIL to maintain calm, prevent violations and mitigate the risk of violence, look for practical localized arrangements that further reduce tension and incidents in areas along the Blue Line and further strengthen the liaison and coordination arrangements, including by continuing to actively engage in the tripartite mechanism.

The visible marking of the Blue Line remains an essential confidence-building activity that has helped to calm tensions. I encourage the parties to continue to work

with UNIFIL in the ongoing process to mark the Blue Line in its entirety and to find solutions for areas where agreement by the parties has not yet been reached.

The attitude of the local population towards UNIFIL remains generally positive. In no small part, that positive attitude is the result of the extensive engagement of UNIFIL troops and international and national civilian staff with the local population, ensuring that the mandate and activities of the Mission are well understood.

Unauthorized armed individuals, weapons and assets are still present inside the area of operations of UNIFIL, as evidenced by breaches of the cessation of hostilities, as well as sightings and firing of weapons by persons other than Lebanese Armed Forces personnel. I urge the Lebanese authorities to take all actions necessary to ensure that there are no unauthorized armed personnel, assets or weapons in the area between the Blue Line and the Litani River.

UNIFIL, in cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces, remains determined to act with all means available within its mandate and capabilities on concrete information provided regarding the illegal presence of armed personnel, weapons or infrastructure inside its area of operations.

Ultimately, the success of UNIFIL is dependent upon success in the political context of implementing resolution 1701 (2006). For the safety of both the Lebanese and Israeli peoples, the onus is on the parties to build upon the effective liaison and coordination mechanisms that have been established with UNIFIL and to take advantage of the calm across the Blue Line to strengthen the cessation of hostilities by working towards a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution to the conflict, as envisaged in resolution 1701 (2006). UNIFIL, in close coordination with the Special Coordinator for Lebanon, stands ready to assist the parties in making further progress in that regard.

As at 15 July 2016, the total number of military personnel stands at 10,574. The UNIFIL civilian component numbers 242 international and 577 national staff. I am grateful to the 40 troop-contributing countries that make up UNIFIL for their ongoing commitment. That commitment, coupled with the development of a strategic partnership with the Lebanese Armed Forces, has enabled the successful implementation of several key aspects of resolution 1701 (2006). UNIFIL continues to play a crucial role in ensuring peace and stability in southern Lebanon, in addition to ensuring the full respect for the Blue Line by both Lebanon and Israel. However, as the UNIFIL mandate approaches its expiration date, it is clear that more work remains to be done.

I would like to express my appreciation to the Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNIFIL, Major General Michael Beary, and to all the military and civilian personnel of UNIFIL, for the work they are carrying out in southern Lebanon in the service of peace.

Regarding the financial aspects of UNIFIL, in its resolution 70/280 of 17 June 2016, the General Assembly appropriated the amount of $488.7 million for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of the Force beyond 31 August 2016, the cost of maintaining UNIFIL would be limited to the amounts approved by the General Assembly.

As at 20 July 2016, unpaid assessed contributions to the Special Account for UNIFIL amounted to $64.2 million. Total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations at the same date amounted to $5,519.4 million. Reimbursement of troop costs has been made for the period up to 30 April 2016, while reimbursement of the costs of contingent-owned equipment has been made for the period up to 31 March 2016, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

With the above information in mind, I recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further period of 12 months, until 31 August 2017.

I would be grateful if you would bring the present letter to the attention of the members of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) **BAN** Ki-moon